

JENNIFER ERNISSE

Looking at the other side of 21

Time flies. Every year about this time, I usually get excited about my birthday. I get excited about the gifts, money, attention and the ritual of it all.

But this week, as my 22nd birthday looms over me like a dark, foreboding cloud, I couldn't help but ponder my age. Bad idea.

Just like the biblical wife of Lot who looked back and turned into a pillar of salt, I looked forward and felt as though I would meet that same fate.

I had peaked at 21, and it was all downhill from there. In the ensuing passages, I have spelled out "aging" and attached a meaning to each of the letters so that they reflect my newly found fear of getting older.

"A" is for ability, agility, mobility. I have noticed that my ability to be a flexible person has diminished quite rapidly over the last year. Today, unlike in my high school days when doing the splits or high kicks or various other moves for drill team was just a matter of setting my mind to Gumby mode, I can no longer bend and twist quite the way I used to.

The other day I tried to do a "bridge up," one of those hideous moves that is a staple of junior high gymnastics. I forced myself to hold this ungodly position for three seconds before I collapsed onto the floor. Recovery time: one hour.

Not only am I no longer flexible physically, but I also can see my mental agility dropping off rapidly. I can see that I am more rigid in my ideas; although I may be able to see someone else's point, I still like mine better.

I went to the post office last week to get stamps and grumbled on my way out of the Nebraska Union about how I can't believe the price has skyrocketed to 29 cents when I can recall that not so long ago postage was a mere nine cents. Oh my God, I thought. Forget being anything like my mom — I was turning into my grandmother.

I realize that mobility doesn't begin with the letter A, but this is my column and I thought this was an important point. Why is it that older people settle down in the same place? I used to think that Lincoln was sooo boring and that it was imperative that I get myself to a coast as soon as I graduated.

I'm starting to think that Lincoln isn't such a bad place after all and that I may want to raise my family here and practice medicine in my hometown. I think I need psychological help!

"G" is for gray. I was at my hair salon for a cut and style a few weeks back. As Mikki, my stylist, was brushing my long auburn locks, she pulls a single hair from my hair and said: "Jen, you're getting old. I just found your first gray hair."

I screamed in horror just like McCauley Culkin for several seconds as she laid my hair on the table in front of me. After the smelling salts had kicked in, I looked at that one despicable lock of hair, only to realize that it was simply splattered with paint from the home improvements my roommate and I had done the week before.

"I" is for immunity. As I embark on my path to the geriatrics ward, I realize that sometimes I do not notice or care about the ways of the world like I should.

I hear a lot of people discussing the election and how they are sick of "politics as usual." I remember last election was the first time I ever voted. I was thrilled to have the privilege that some of my sisters in the past were deprived of. I cast my vote for Bush, whom I thought would be the "environmental" president, the man for better education systems, and the purveyor of "Read my lips. No new taxes."

Bush failed me on all three counts. Four years later, and four years wiser, I realize that a vote for Clinton is just a vote against a Bush/Reagan stronghold that permeated its ignorance of the underprivileged and was lobbied to no end by rich special interest groups.

And at this point, I just don't think that either of these candidates have the ability or the leadership that can overhaul the engine of this country; jump-starting the battery just won't get it running effectively again. And so it is the way of the world, and I feel as if I have built up an immunological resistance to the handful of men who wield all the power in the United States.

"N" is for no challenges associated with your birthday. It is no secret to any of my friends that I am proud of the fact that ever since I set foot on this campus I have been getting into the bars.

I truly considered going out and getting free drinks on the date of birth of the person on my fake ID. I would have had the pleasure of two birthdays in that case. I have to admit it was thrilling at first, but the feeling became lackluster when I became such a regular at bars that they didn't card me anymore, and I wasn't even truly 21 yet.

My question now: What is there left to get away with? Am I supposed to try to get social security a few years shy of 62? Can I get my 10 percent off at Denny's at 55 instead of 60?

"G" is for gravity. Just like the old house I moved into two months ago, with age our bodies settle. We eventually reach a point where our facial skin around our cheeks droops, our laugh lines become wrinkles, and some other choice parts aren't so perky anymore.

I have decided this is the reason that older people aren't thought to have sex anymore. Maybe our bodies, like my apartment, settle differently. What if my hubby's body droops three inches, and I only droop 2 1/2 inches? We just won't "fit" together like we used to.

So much for aging. Many people have tried to tell me that things get better with age. "Like fine wine, age brings perfection." At this point, I beg to differ. So from here on, I'm 22 forever, no matter what anyone says.

Ernisse is a senior pre-med major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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SAM KEPFIELD

Social conscience not for military

The silly season is upon us again — that recurrent urge in liberals to feel good by doing good, fighting those at the top of their list of enemies.

In this case it's the U.S. military. Liberals are pushing, and that great military strategist Bill Clinton has promised, to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military. The Association of Students of the University of Nebraska this month wisely voted to urge the Academic Senate to soften its stand on withdrawing ROTC credit unless the Pentagon changed its policy.

And, in the wake of the Tailhook scandal, feminists — among them a likely Secretary of Defense for Clinton,

Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo., — are screaming louder than ever for women to be allowed in combat.

The ultimate aim is to turn the military into one more social-awareness and sensitivity ghetto. That is not only wrong, it's dangerous.

Both arguments are flawed, though the case for women is stronger in a limited sense. I'll take them one at a time. Ladies first.

The troublesome thing about Tailhook is that it's being called sexual harassment and used as a wedge to put women into full-combat roles. It's a nonsequitur.

Tailhook was a case of sexual assault, a criminal act, punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It can be taken care of without any social consciousness-raising.

Don't get me wrong. It took a lot of courage for Lt. Paula Coughlin to come forward in the face of all the disapproval from her peers, and frankly, I salute the woman for it. Those who demonstrated such ungentlemanly and un-officer-like be-

havior in public and toward not just women but their colleagues should be called on it. It's unprofessional.

But to go from this to saying that women belong in foxholes is nonsensical.

First of all, women already have combat roles. During the Panama invasion, women military police officers were engaged in firefights with Panamanian forces. In the Gulf war, women drove supply convoys and air-defense units and staffed supply dumps.

The nature of modern warfare is such that in any major land, air and sea battle the first thing the enemy is going to do is send a few squadrons of fighter-bombers screaming to the rear to hit supply dumps. No fuel or ammunition means any army will grind to a halt in short order.

In such a scenario, women will be coming under air attack and trying to knock those planes out of the sky. Sounds like combat to me.

To be fair, the Russians in World War II resorted to women to fill combat air squadrons and tank companies. The women did quite well. Several women became aces against the German air force, and Russian tanks crewed by women turned back German tank divisions.

Allowing women to fly combat missions, where they are already flying supply missions — which, as the war in Bosnia demonstrates, can be shot down just as easily — makes sense. They are better able to withstand G-forces that fighter aircraft sometimes pull in combat, causing the pilot to black out. If they're qualified, let them do it.

As for gays in the military, the story is different. Here, a distinction must be made, a very important one, in the debate over whether homosexuality is learned or is genetic.

It may be both, as is alcoholism.

One might have a genetic predisposition toward either, but it does not automatically follow that the behavior will ensue.

I have no doubt that many homosexuals are proficient in their duties. But proficiency is not everything in a military organization. Discipline and morale are.

Gen. Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is on record as stating that homosexual behavior is inconsistent with military order and discipline.

Many, including Rep. Schroeder, challenge this fact, claiming that it was used in the past to exclude blacks from the military. Powell's response was powerful.

"Skin color is a benign, non-behavioral characteristic. Sexual orientation is perhaps the most profound of human behavioral characteristics. Comparison of the two is a convenient but invalid argument."

The point of this is that the military is no place to try out the latest fads in social-consciousness. The purpose of a military is to kill people and break things.

And to do so, you need people that are a bit rough, who don't conform to the norms expected by the compassion and sensitivity fascists. No sane person is going to land an F-14 on a aircraft carrier deck in rough seas, storm a beach against a hail of bullets or jump out of a transport plane from 500 feet with no reserve chute. Yet this is what the military is all about.

If we give into this craze for sensitivity, then what we end up with is a bunch of candy-assed choirboys who might relate to their female and gay counterparts in a socially acceptable manner, but who can't fire a gun without going to an encounter group first.

Keppfield is a graduate student in history, an alumnus of the UNL College of Law and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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